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OO RUEHBZ RUEHGU RUEHGI RUEHJO RUEHMR RUEHRN

DE RUEHKI #0723 2111456

ZNR UUUUU ZZH

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FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9953

INFO RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1274

RUEHBZ/AMEMBASSY BRAZZAVILLE 0136

RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE

RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC

RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE

RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

UNCLAS KINSHASA 000723

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

E.O.12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [CF](#) [CG](#)

SUBJECT: CONGOLESE GOVERNMENT SILENCES RFI
TRANSMISSIONS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY

REF:(A) Kinshasa 426; (B)Kinshasa 448

1.(SBU) Summary: On July 26 the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo shut down Radio France Internationale's (RFI) frequencies in the capital and elsewhere in the country "for reasons of national security." At a July 28 press conference, the Minister of Information announced that the GDRC's contract with RFI has been cancelled, and that broadcasts by the French network will not be reinstated until a new contract is agreed on. In the meantime, most RFI listeners in Kinshasa are not affected as the transmission tower in nearby Brazzaville, Republic of Congo, continues operations. The government's action to prevent its citizens from listening to RFI is cause for concern. End summary.

2.(SBU) The GDRC unilaterally cancelled RFI's broadcast contract on Friday, July 24. On July 26, Media Affairs and Communication Minister Lambert Mende ordered that RFI's Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, Kisangani, and Matadi signals be shut down. The reason given was a news report broadcast on RFI that, according to Mende, "undermined the peace process in the Eastern Congo." Mende was apparently referring to a report by RFI reporter Ghislene Dupont quoting the MONUC press spokesman as saying that FDLR rebels had returned to Rwanda because the GDRC had "stopped paying their salaries." (Note: Dupont's account has been challenged by the MONUC spokesman, who denies making such a statement. MONUC's claim is substantiated by a transcript of the press conference. End note.)

3.(SBU) During a July 28 news conference in Kinshasa, Mende defended the shutting down of RFI. Noting that the network has had a contract to broadcast in the DRC since 2001, Mende asserted that RFI must follow DRC laws, including the press law that forbids news organizations from pursuing an agenda that might destabilize the country or demoralize its armed forces. Mende said Dupont's story had "dangerous implications for national security," as it might be interpreted to mean that the GDRC was supporting the FDLR. Mende reminded the audience that Dupont was expelled from the DRC in 2006, and continues to report from outside of the country. RFI's Bunia and Bukavu frequencies (see reftels A and B) were shut down in May and June, respectively, also in response to Dupont's reporting. At that time Mende said Dupont's reporting jeopardized the Goma peace process and could contribute to the "balkanization of the DRC."

4.(SBU) An RFI reporter in the Republic of the Congo (ROC) informed Embassy Brazzaville econoff that RFI is still operational in both Brazzaville and Pointe Noire. Audience reception is somewhat limited in Brazzaville, however, due to the lack of signal from the Kinshasa frequency that usually complements RFI in ROC. Emboff Brazzaville noted that RFI has recently been the subject of criticism from the GROC, notably Minister of Foreign Affairs Basile Ikouebe, who rebuked French ambassador Nicolas Normand on the unfavorable coverage of Congolese elections from foreign media including RFI and France 24. According to emboff, Ikouebe said that, RFI, in

particular, is key to maintaining a "privileged partnership" between the ROC and French political powers.

5.(SBU) Comment: Kinshasa's inhabitants continue to pick up RFI's Brazzaville frequency, and those with internet access can listen to the radio station online. Still, approximately half of the Congolese population does not have access to one of the most reliable and independent news sources available on the radio here. While Dupont's reporting has been combative, inflammatory, and on at least this one occasion, apparently inaccurate (or inaccurately sourced), the shutting down of a major international news network's broadcasts demonstrates is cause for concern. We fear other international broadcasters in the DRC (BBC, Belgian RTBF International, UN's Radio Okapi) could be next in line. End comment.

GARVELINK